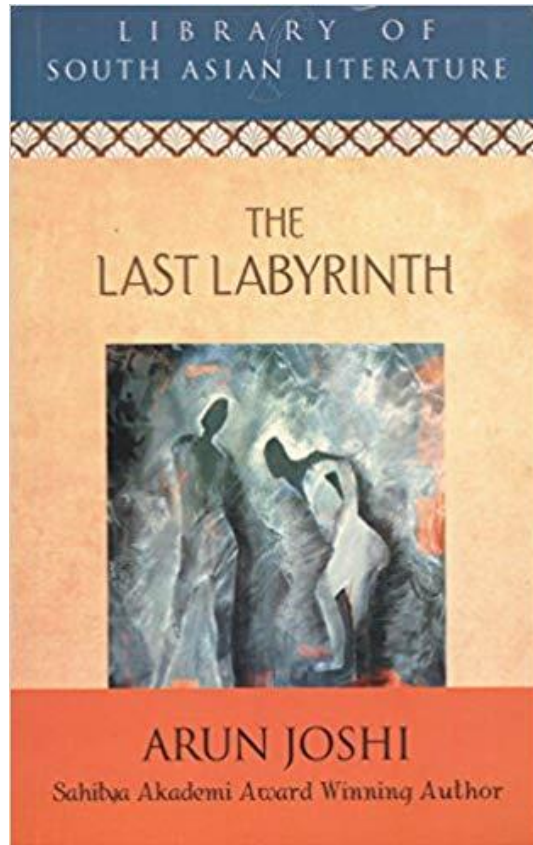


## Self-identity and Emptiness in Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*

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### Abstract

Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for its excellent handling of the theme of contemporary Indian's existential dilemma. It was Arun Joshi's fourth novel dealt with the inner and outer world of a westernized Indian Aristocrat who had lost his spiritual roots. Arun Joshi is concerned with the predicament of modern man and is sensitivity alive to the various dimensions of pressures, exerted by the complex character and demands of the society in which contemporary man is destined to live. In *The Last Labyrinth*, Som was mentally disturbed and filled with anguish, self-hatred and self-pity, for they consider themselves as strangers in this physical world. Self was explored by in his fiction and brought a central focus of the self has to assess its alienation from the family and society. Joshi dealt with the modern man who had no sense of affinity to society amidst which he lived. He found own existence a burden. There is a two alternatives for the present day man with his tragic plight that is modern man either try to adjust to the others, system and hiding his true self or he may give efforts to keep and develop his individuality and therefore alienate himself from society.

The novel *The Last Labyrinth* was surrounded by the world of human emotions. It dealt with restive search for a meaning in human survival, its treatment of the numerous levels of reality and challenging narrative technique. The story was not only about the fascination but also great love. In addition, it consisted of more conflicting themes. It was about a distressed man's search for his existence and search for a practicable substitution among materialism, corruption, alienation and loss in spiritual faith.

The main concern in this research is to explore the sense of alienation and void in the novels of Arun Joshi. Modern man finds himself alienated not only from his fellow men, but also from himself, having nothing to fall back upon in moments of crisis. The malaise of the contemporary man has been greatly irritated by the spiritual stress and strain which is the hallmark of the modern period. Today's world has shrunk in spirit, languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, and disillusionment and meaningless. The most troubling problems that man faces today are the problems of alienation and sense of void. The sharp inconsistency from philosophical viewpoint is that the novelist has mirrored the dilemma of those unbelievers who do not find any metaphysical control beyond this material world.

He remained as an alienated figure till the end of his life. The story located around mainly in Bombay and Benares, was an account of Som Bhaskar's business and love story. He rated Bombay superior to Benares in that it was filled with brilliant industrialists. Benares was only an ancient city of historical value to him and additional, it was often alive with dacoits. But Bhaskar felt that he experienced a sense of isolation and loneliness in both the places. Both were thickly occupied but neither of them was able to give him the sense of belonging he desired for and rid him of his able, intolerable, unexplainable sense of isolation. In Som, the sense of alienation was mixed with a sense of void. It characterized an extension of the theme of his earlier novels so as to project a presentational image of contemporary man's tormented perception challenging with the threat of absurdity. It even mixtures the themes of his earlier novels. When compared to the previous novel, it had been more powerful level of experience. Basavaraj Naiker said, "Som Bhaskar faces the threat of being sucked into a kind of black hole if his consciousness does not arm itself with adequate mental strength and resilience (123).

The novel centred on Bhaskar's conflict with the darkness of death and void in Lal Haveli where he had gone to buy Aftab's shares. It was its confusion passages and dark interior was situated at the end of a blind lane, weird and mysterious and served as a figurative setting for Bhaskar's controversy with the decisions in the psyche. Som Bhaskar was gifted with a highly intellectual and scientific mind which was constantly caught up in a turbulence of ideas, morals, problems of philosophy and metaphysics and was troubled by troublesome thinking. He found himself examining through the labyrinth of life and death, his very freedom being no different from a void in which he suspended in his attempt to get a fix on reality. It goes to the credit of Joshi, that Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth*, like his other westernized protagonists belonging to the upper crust of society, was a firmly rooted in an authentic Indian context as the characters of Raja Rao and R. K. Narayanan. The novel holds up a mirror to a certain section of the present day Indian society

with its cynicism, hedonism, loss of faith, confusion of values and anxieties. The last labyrinth brought out Som Bhaskar's route from the labyrinth of a modern society to the light of a primitive mountain God. He was acquainted with the western way of life, its pursuit for sophistication and materialism. Yet he knew that "money was a dirt, a whore, so were houses, carts, carpets" (TLL 9).

Som Bhaskar was a millionaire, industrialist at twenty-five years who inherited a gigantic plastic manufacturing industry. He was educated at the best of universities. He married Meena of his own choice and had two children. His wife was well-bred and beautiful and remains loyal to her husband in spite of his love affair with Leela Sabnis. She was a psychiatrist from Michigan and with Anuradha in Benares. But he suffered from an insatiable "hunger of the body and the spirit" (TLL 9). Joshi's existential vision became clearer and he seemed to insist upon the realization of the eternal self that leads to emancipation from all the anguishes of life. Like his wife if he possessed the inner poise of the spirit, he could derive consolation from his prayer to God. But as he was a non-believer that was out of question: "if I in God I could pray, may be run a rosary through my fingers. But that's out" (TLL 8). The experience of sense of void and meaningless in life were Som's feelings as a modern anti-hero embodying chaos and uncertainties. He suffered from in definable hunger and restlessness. He could not find answers to his moral and cultural alienation and cannot return to society. This character indicated the problems of alienation and identity. In the midst of wealth and sophistication, he felt a void within which led to his identity crisis. As Som sat with Aftab and Anuradha in the Haveli, he was reminded of the insignificance of his existence: "if someone, man or god, had watched my life, from a great height, would I have appeared to him an ant threading through a maze, knocking about, against one wall, then another?" (TLL47). The sad songs of Azizun taught Som the fact that all the struggles to climb the ladder of success were futile. Only a simple life led with faith, matters in the long run. The sad He had everything that was needed for worldly pleasures. But he felt restless and inconsolable and overcome by anxiety and fear of death.

The unanswered divided of the inner mind between his indistinct subjectivity and the intellectual balance of things, was set in the beginning at the end. Towards the end of the novel, Som Bhaskar was still there, hardly developed, formed, although focussed more sharply on the vision he experienced in Anuradha. In the opening of the novel, he said:

Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours beside my wife, within reach of tranquillisers. I had sung the same strident song: I want. I want. I want (TLL 9).

He had an unquenchable passion for possessions. He went on desperately living, clinging to one thing or person and trying to seek satisfaction in sex, wealth and fame. He felt a void, idleness and was lost in the labyrinth of thoughts. Som misunderstood the restless wanderings of his mind as hunger for sex and consequently experimented with several sexual affairs. Leila Sabnis psychoanalysed Som's character as followed "you are much too high stung without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive

fornicator” (TLL 72). In this novel the hero Som Bhaskar’s conflict was not with the society, but with the forms and forces beyond the computation of reason and science.

Som’s suffering was more intensified when he began his education in two cultures. He was born in India and brought up under a religion mother, he imbued religious faith and spiritual learning. During his study abroad, he came into contact with the western way of thinking. As a result, his belief in direct reason practical wisdom and the scientific attitude went sharper which was again reinforced by his father when he returned to India. Thus, he possessed a confused personality barren of faith and rest in mind. His life became a rudderless boat being tossed on turbulent waves horrified by “going forward and backward and sideways of the mind” (TLL 48). In order to settle himself and in search of the final answers to his wanting wishes, he turned in a compulsive fornicator and ran to different women to satisfy himself. Every affair fizzled out leaving him alone and puzzled and he failed to find out the true path. He found himself in a mist everywhere. He reminisces:

I was a womanizer all right, and a boozier, but my womanizing and boozing had not settled anything. I had inherited the afflictions of both of them – for what were they if not afflictions, afflictions that had led me into unbearable entanglements. A year ago, although battered, I was getting by fairly reasonably. (TLL 144)

Som fled from one woman to another, from one business adventure to another made him all the more dissatisfied. His womanizing and boozing to shut up his voices in his incorrigible vacuums had not settled anything. His troubles got multiplied by an awareness of the irrelevance of life. He found the world meaningless and was convinced that life is full of complications “a labyrinth within labyrinth” (TLL 25). It was physical in Lal Haveli and Benares which were both included. At the second level of symbolic, the Lal Haveli stood for the maze of life and the last labyrinth was death itself. It was even more mysterious than existence itself. Som, was the creation of multicultural city. He found himself different in the ancient society steeped in superstition. The novel concerns Som’s mad pursuit to possess Anuradha, but this mad pursuit lent metaphysical dimensions to it, as he encountered the mysteries of life, death, love and god. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh says:

Som’s obsession is one of love, a love that does not liberate him and sublimate his desires, as the love of Bilasia and Billy in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. It freezes him as he is ego centric and possessive. Som’s hysterical and relentless pursuit of Anuradha is a tortuous affair that brings him face to face with the mistakes of life, death, love and god and constitutes what may be called the nucleus of the story. This complex affair in which the sensuous and the spiritual dimensions are interwoven inextricably, unfolds in an intriguing juxtaposition of locales (131-132).

For him everything was in a haze. He lost his attitudes and was affected with a sense of disturbance. He told Anuradha: “I am dislocated. Why am I here? Why do I come here? (TLL 97). These words of Som bear ample proof to his identity crisis. In *The Last Labyrinth* Arun Joshi explored Som Bhaskar’s mind which was confused by the questions about life, existence and reality.

The opposing desires of intellect and intuition, doubt and faith, scepticism and blind submission pulled him in opposite directions with the result that he suffered from the crisis of consciousness. His every experience and relationship much to his depression, deepened his sense of insufficiency and he continued to walk through the maze of existence. The mysterious voices that he heard and the strange visions he saw which made him unhappy and restless. Sleeping pills, anaesthetic and hot baths failed to sooth his tortured mind and his cooked tensions. His psyche was affected deep down by his heredity. His mother's blind faith in Krishna and his father's doubtful and analytical outlook perplex him. The contradiction in the outlook and beliefs of his parents affects the synchronisation of balance of his personality.

In addition, he was attacked by the outcry of his inner voice. But he did not understand that it was the outcry of his inner voice to and mistakes it for one for worldly possessions. He, therefore, tried to reduce the disorder and disquiet of his consciousness through the pursuit of women and acquisition of business enterprises. He noted, "I had learnt another thing, one among the several cadenzas, simple and complex, with which I conducted my orchestras of discontent. I had learnt to corner companies." (TLL 9-10). Som was disillusioned with the contemporary society marked by images of "All those buses and cars and taxis and men scurrying like cockroaches. For what? (TLL 42). Even Benares which he visited repeatedly had become "diseased and bankrupt, wallowing in filth and humbug... a city of perversions" (TLL124) and these things symbolized the moral degeneration of society and seemed to make up of benighted creatures, strange murky shapes, drifting along aimlessly. His search for meaning in life turns out to be an exercise in futility when regarded himself as a bird flapping its easy wings, "not able, for all the striving to chart a course" (TLL 49). In fact, he found existence to be void, which worried him: "it is the voids of the word, more than its objects that bother me. The voids and empty spaces, within and without" (TLL 42). He became acutely aware of it when his mother died. As he recalled,

You have to have a little 'incident' or get a telephone at midnight about so and so popping if fir catch your wife with another man or be told you have cancer to see the voids within. It was the voids and not the guava groves that I had walked through that morning my mother died; and voids too in her room in Bombay; and voids each time an affair ended; and the morning my daughter was born, and on and on. Voids all. (TLL 43).

This sense of unhappiness leads him to a sense of emptiness within and without. The first time he had his feeling of 'void' was when he visited the caves of Ajanta at 18, he deceived no emotions at the news of his mother's death. Even on the Manikarnika Ghats at Benares, the sight of funeral pyres, the smell of burning flesh and the sound of bursting bones gave him the same sense of emptiness. He didn't know the cause of this void and spends sleepless nights.

Sam Bhaskar was twenty-two, he felt superior, more in control. No totally in control and as he recalled, "I had the conceit of youth. Because I slept ten hours, had more money than I knew of, had laid half a dozen women... I felt certain I shall never get the boot." (TLL 24). His father, a scientist, had come to doubt the efficacy of science, and its being able to solve the problem of causes,

while confirming his belief in science, since he wondered, “Couldn’t there be a First Cause that would explain everything, where nature might lie behind the natures of all the rest?” (TLL 24). Som Bhaskar dismissed his father’s daydreams as the prattle of a confused mind responded with a cynical smile to his father’s gentle rebuke. “But, surely, you want to understand, Som”. (TLL 24). His mother’s death shattered his satisfaction and undermined his faith not only in Lord Krishna whose ardent follower his mother had been but also, in himself, since his mother had continued to believe till her death that Lord Krishna would save her refusing to take any medicine for cancer from which she has been suffering. He lost in the Labyrinth of his mind “going forwards, backwards and sideways” (TLL 48) in trying to overcome the anxiety over death which became all the more accentuated when he experienced a cardiac arrest. He asked,

For instance, why this little ‘incident’? True, my father had a bad heart, but why had I been touched so early? What was now to happen to my pursuit of fame? (TLL 41).

He tried in vain to get rid of the ‘nagging fear or cold, cold death” (TLL66) through sex in the arms of a woman. When he happens to meet Anuradha, Aftab’s mistress while trying to buy Aftab’s shares, he found the need for a psychic language so as to communicate with her. He experienced what he had not experienced with any woman before:

What do they know of Anuradha that I know, or of Gargi of Lal Haveli, that sepulchral, sensual den of Aftab’s amidst the labyrinths of Benares? Even my dreams are not free of them. Strange murky shapes float through their tangled web. Animals and wheels of fire and brilliant suns blazing away in dark starless skies. I see myself grotesque, naked, my face distorted as if in a funny mirror. Anuradha, my poor Anuradha, walking shoeless across a burning desert. Gargi sitting in the middle of nowhere reading a book, throwing a cowrie shell, and saying to me: ‘She is your Shakthi” (TLL21).

Som had a willpower to possess Anuradha, he shuttled between Bombay and Benares. She was beyond his comprehension. “She was like the ocean, one could never reach the bottom of her” (TLL 121). According psychological approach, in Som the Freudian id dominated ego and super ego. In the beginning, Anuradha was indifferent to Som’s offer of love but his next visit to Benares, a slight change was occurred in Anuradha’s behaviour and found Anuradha by his bedside at night in the Lal Haveli and she agreed to him. Som also realized that Anuradha was unavoidable to him and kept on visiting Lal Haveli for her sake and enjoyed “the nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the chromatic shower” (TLL 111). Som rushed about in search of happiness and meaningfulness in life. His search for Anuradha made him a psychic wreck. According to Ramakrishna Rao, “Anuradha is a labyrinthine woman at once young and old, ancient and modern demoniac in her lust and divine in her love. She is every man’s woman and no man’s wife” (27). Internally and externally Som had been troubled for a long time by voids. He experienced the voids continually. The empty feeling did not leave him at peace with himself even for a minute. Every day he went to bed with the feeling of emptiness and wake up with the same feeling the next morning. He didn’t know what and how to fill the emptiness with. He knew that there should be

something that can fill this vacuum. He found within himself: “Nothing but an empty roaring like the roar of the sea in conch” (TLL 105). He fought insomnia all night and sleepwalks throughout the night. He had tried to drown himself in drink and soothe his nerves with tranquilizers, but as soon as their effects were over, the disorder would return with a harsh ferociousness. He had many illegal affairs with innumerable women. But each of these affairs had ended in bitterness and frustration. It had been implied periodically that there was a bit of Meursault of the Outsider, and K of Trial in Som therefore he found his life absurd and can possibly have no solutions to his problem. All along his life, Som Bhaskar suffered from an inner crisis and Som’s problems were to be examined in the context of the changed social and psychological realities in modern India. Lack of faith, Som did not do any good. He was suffering from tension, unhappiness, disturbance, hysteria, neurosis, some strange dreams and insomnia while others around him were happy even in sufferings and in the face of death. Som’s suffering was on account of his fear of death. He admitted, “I was insecure... I was afraid of death. That made a little more sense. I was mortally afraid of death” (TLL 66). Som felt diffident and discontented and knew that “if discontent is my trademark, trust is Geeta’s” (TLL 56).

In this way, the genetic traits and the social atmosphere made Som a split personality, split at many levels. In spite of his happy marriage with Geeta, a loving wife, Som had little fornications. To understand the cause, he consulted a psychiatrist. He suggested him a lot of things but the important thing he told Som was that his problems existed beyond and above the realm of psychology. He admitted open heartedly, “You know, Mr. Bhaskar, psychiatry doesn’t allow certain approaches to problems like yours. The fact, however, remains that such problems existed much before the advent of psychiatry. Certain approaches were devised at that time” (TLL 66). Som was still puzzled. The psychiatrist convinced him to realize an entity beyond the realm of psychology and which may be a subject of religion. He told Som the truth:

You can imagine this planet humming with souls, each wanting something. Of course, many might want the same thing. A soul might also imagine that his wants, desires are no doubt, is a big if. Until he meets this right soul there is no peace. When you meet the right soul then, of course, things might be peaceful, may even move on towards a higher goal... religions would not have been so successful if such a higher goal did not exist” (TLL 67)

The psychiatrist had revealed him a right track, but he was rational, and his mind was not ready to accept because “one has to find a proof of the existence of souls, though” (TLL 67). He had questioned still: “but what if nothing like a soul at all existed? What if nothing existed that could not be reasoned through as old Leela insisted? (TLL 68)

He was overwhelmed by a sense of void and of emptiness within him rusted by this overwhelming sense of disappointment, Som tried to settle his inner hunger by the possession of a business initiative and a beautiful woman named Anuradha. But nothing brought tranquillity and peace to his mind. He shared his problem with his friend and physician Dr. K, “You know, for many

years now, I have had this awful feeling that I wanted something. But the sad thing was it didn't make the slightest difference when I managed to get what I had wanted. My hunger was just as bad as ever" (TLL 174).

Som Bhaskar appeared to hear only the language of sex and in each of the women he pursued to find a different quality to meet a different need. In his wife, Geeta, he found a trust that is reasoning, and in Leela Sabnis, a philosophy professor, a fusion of his urge for freedom and his father's scientific quest for the first cause in everything. Leela with her analytical mind tried to reason with him and made him faced up to the reality.

If man can go to the moon, surely, he can make a dent on understanding himself, he can at least make a dent. What can you do with mysticism? Take it or leave it. What good is doctrine that says: take me or leave me, do not analyse me. It is Descartes that you need to understand, Som Bhaskar (TLL 71).

The reaction of Som was that he had enjoyed her talk, worshipped in it, her talk mostly of him. Leela's prescription did not seem to help him as it implied the separation of the world of matter from that of the spirit. Som needs were, "something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined" (TLL 74). It was the clamorous voice within, "I want. I want" which seemed to have led him to Lal Haveli and its labyrinths which symbolised "the microcosmic labyrinth of life and reality". As Aftab told him, "There are rooms, corridors that only bring you back to where you started" (TLL32). Since the Haveli was built by his ancestors to puzzle their enemies. Dante's work *Divine Comedy*. But unlike Beatrice in Dante's work, Anuradha could only save him from phantasizing his self, instead of clarifying it for him. Anuradha told him, "You are not as clever as you think. You are wrong about many things. You are even wrong about yourself. You think you know a lot, when, in fact, you don't" (TLL 55). Significantly, Anuradha suffered as no other human being would have -- illegitimate child, insane mother, home, molested as a child. Witness to murder. Suicides, every conceivable evil in the world" (TLL 175). But she was pure like the high flame in the temple which burnt to ashes what was not pure. Its light gave gloom of Lal Haveli, filled with love. Once she said about her relationship with Aftab, "it is better not to be anybody's wife... you cannot marry everyone you love. So why marry anyone at all?" (TLL 39). In spite of his unhappy life, she was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna and instead of running away from the corrupt world. She had chosen to remain and wage an unceasing battle against the forces of dehumanization, materialism and male egotism. At last, the light of Moksha emerged upon Som as if the whole universe had come out of void. Som believed that the only way to solve this problem was by obtaining information and struggles hard to come to terms with life and find out its meaning with the help of knowledge. But this only added to his confusion. A sense of void and the experience of feeling fragmented were fairly natural sensations for the present day generation. In spite of the unbelievable development made in the field of technology, we remained in a barbaric age, fighting confusion, void and problems of the self. Most of the characters in this novel especially Aftab, Anuradha and Som were anxious strugglers. Joshi made a hopeless attempt in the novel to lead Som in the path of self-realization with the help of the other characters.



Som Bhaskar's passion to possess her was strengthened by her denial to produce to him. She told to him, "you don't know what is wrong and you don't know what you want" (TLL 97). Som was unsatisfied by his failure to overcome Anuradha, he went to Europe with his wife Geeta hoping to get rid of his obsession with

Benares, Aftab, Anuradha, their Haveli – all were bores, frogs stuck in their marshy wells. What I wanted, I decided, was to go abroad, get the hell away from this land of obsession (TLL 103).

"She was not self-conscious about her body of whose grace and sensuousness she seemed unaware" (TLL 36). The succeeding pages of the novel, mainly the first part, unfold Som's unconquerable hunger for sex. He was blinded by passion and he was to possess her again and again. Although Som had gone to deal with Aftab's company. Anuradha exercised such an overwhelming fascination over him that he ignored his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her. Though a typical product of denial and suffering. Anuradha had a perception of life, whereas, Som was devoid of it. She had deep faith in God and Som accepted that she was a woman:

Gifted with a special vision, a vantage point high above the earth, from where she could see the melee below as ordinary men could not. And it was as though the vision always left her sadder, taking away from her the hope and the laughter with which she had been born. (TLL 52).

The relationship between Som and Anuradha was one of the most complex relationships in the novel. She became so much attached to him that he can't live without her. Though he returned to Bombay, he repeatedly went to Benares to meet her. Lal Haveli attracted him in some mysterious ways. Anuradha became a labyrinth itself and Som expected a transparency from her. Som Bhaskar, however was unable to forget Anuradha and his mounting passion for her made him important, making Geeta miserable. He cut short his holiday and rushed back to India.

An individual looked for an identity neither in possession nor in some group do activity because when an individual lost the accuracy given by his tradition. Som Bhaskar searched his identity in possession and he had an inordinate desire to possess Anuradha, Aftab's mistress and to acquire his business. His justifications were highly interesting. He wanted Aftab's business because the latter cannot run it well. He told Anuradha: "Not everybody has the brains to run a business, you know. (TLL 11). He wanted Anuradha because what he wanted was "something, somebody, and somewhere in which the two worlds combined" (TLL 74). Here Som mentioned the world of the spirit and the world of the matter. His problems originated out of the conflicting claims of his psyche, consciously he wanted to remain a westernized Indian, deep in materialism, but his hidden mind dragged him to the esoteric charms of his traditional culture. Robert Ross, an American critic scholar in his paper 'The Clash of Opposites' in Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* finds the genesis of Som's troubles in his traditional bent of mind and western education. (25)

Arun Joshi's stated aim was to go outside psychology to the theoretical roots of human identity in consonance with the Indian custom of viewing psychology as an essential part of philosophy. His curious clinking up of this approach with Jung's definition of neurosis as the suffering of the soul had not yet discovered its meaning. Keith May's views on 'self' best illustrated this point. According to Keith, Reaching the self does not bring the end of trouble and sorrow but it does bring a considerable lessening of suffering and a total absence of obsession. It brings also a sense of empathy with the world at large so that by an outward irony the more a man becomes himself, the more he realizes his identity with the rest of nature.

Som's fascination with Anuradha was one of love, a love that did not liberate him and sublimate desires as the love of Bilasia did Billy in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. It interrupted him as a self-centred and selfish. Som's agitated and harsh chase of Anuradha was a twisting affair that brings him face to face with the mysteries of life, death and God constitutes what may be called the nuclear of the story. Anuradha was a mysterious and Som had a thought that she would be the answer for his perplexing questions. Som shuttled between Bombay and Benares with a determination to possess her. Anuradha gave love and consideration on Som and unbelievably saved him from certain death of a heart attack.

Som's days were fulfilled only with his meeting with Anuradha. It was indecisive efforts to him to forget her and to remove her out of his life. He tried to shake her off as a dream, but he became conscious of the uselessness of his search and obsession for her. The more he was obsessed with Anuradha, the more acute sense of loneliness stricken his mind. Som's mothers had firm faith in God, Som was an agnostic. He had seen his mother dying inch by inch of cancer and Krishna. In a violent reaction to his mother's room. Thus, once and all, he rejected God and faith. Literary critics of various shades had offered their explanations of Som's quest. Rajeshwar Mittapillai, in his article "Orchestra of Discontent: Som's Quest in *The Last Labyrinth*" quoted Sanjay Narasimhaiah's words which diagnosed the major temptation of Som to his succumbing to "a deep rooted desire to know everything in life, ranging from the interest of his business shares to the outcome of man's belief in God and adds that his tragedy was that anything that cannot be known or logically conceived did not exist for him. And hence, his mental unrest" (133).

Gargi gave Som the much required-controlling shares of Aftab's company, made him to realize the meaninglessness of worldly pleasures. This search for the higher values of life involves many exploratory into the troubled labyrinth of the psyche. Unaware of the nature of his needs he wanted after Aftab's shares. The spiritual influence of Gargi was like comfort to his wounded soul but he refused to accept her spiritual guidance. Som's problem was the predicament of the modern man. Born out of the diverse cultural influences his problems disturbed him. He found himself examining through the labyrinth of life and death. He went to Europe with his wife Geeta because of the unfulfilled failure to win Anuradha and to get rid of his obsessions with Benares, Aftab and Haveli. Som could not forget Anuradha and his mounting passion for her made him impotent. Anuradha was not just a physical entity. Aftab began to cry and offered good night to Som. Later on, Som met Anuradha and forced her to go with him because anything could happen to her. Anuradha also

desired Som to go out from their life. Next day Som reached the Haveli and Aftab informed him that Anuradha had not returned from the temple where she had gone last night to celebrate *janmashatami*. Police failed to trace her. He received a letter from Aftab cursing Som that he had betrayed him like a backstabber. This traumatised Som through and through. The question of life and death kept on tormenting and he was once again left alone in the labyrinth of the inscrutable world "like an ant threading through a maze, knocking about, against one wall, then another (TLL 47)". He was defeated from his life. He could neither bang the unknown of Anuradha nor resolve his existential problem about God and death. He still stumbled in torture and failed to redirect any form of his desire extending from animalistic to the spiritual.

The western world of science and rationalism, the Indian world of faith and transcendentalism contribute to his already confused mind. He was completely alienated from his self and fumbled about in his search for identity. His mind was like a labyrinth where there were mazes. At length, he realised the futility of his running after wealth. Anuradha's disappearance left him psychologically and emotionally distressed. In utter anxiety he cried out and this marked the shift from hopelessness to helplessness. In his enormous sadness, he remembered God and made an intense passionate appeal to Anuradha to pray for him:

Anuradha, listen. Listen to me wherever you are. Is there a God where you are? Have you met Him? Does He have a face? Does He speak? Does He hear? Does He understand the language that we speak? Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have meet Him and if He is willing to listen, then Anuradha, my soul, tell Him, tell this God, to have mercy upon me. Tell him I am weary. Of so many fears; so much doubting. Of this dark earth and these empty heavens. Please for me, Anuradha. He will listen to you. (TLL 205)

And towards the end when his urge to get Anuradha tumbled short of his own knowing her that she personified possibly a Jungian anima in her, he was still trapped in the conflict with which he began and he wanted to hold on to it, perhaps afraid of leave his prayers of 'I want I want'.

The novel, according to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English*, was a delineation of the pestilent-stricken modern world where people had lost their sense of identity. It was "a paradigm of the contemporary diseased world where discontents grow their own pestilential vapours, and self-doomed humanity – lacking faith, lacking Grace – is tragically resigned to being suffocated by them in *The Last Labyrinth* (243).

When the novel ended, Som, amidst his faith and doubt, having and possessing, made a suicidal attempt but Geeta saved him and shook him "gently as though rousing a man from sleep (TLL 206). The novel ended with leaving Som with his wife Geeta. The novel turned into a spiritual autobiography of a soul lost into the labyrinth of the world seeking the way to exit. In its artificial vision of Indian philosophy, this work summed up Arun Joshi's existential views with more intensity and from a viewpoint of changing pattern of individual relationships and experiences. Views relating to opposing forces, namely, faith and doubt, science and religion, illusion and reality,

god and death, etc., are presented in the novel. The above stated elements were joined together in order to analyse the difficulties of human being. The protagonist's personal name itself incorporates the opposite qualities of Moon (Som) and the Sun (Bhaskar). Accordingly, the warp and woof of the novel was woven out of the challenge of various opposing forces that we found in its protagonist.

Bhaskar's search in life was to find out why he should believe in the mystic concepts of Indian tradition. His search did not lead him to any positive conclusion. His father had voiced his doubts about the 'First Cause' in his son's presence. The father's intention was to discover the connection between cause and effect. The division became deceptive when Som's confusion was analysed in harmony with his psychological inheritance that his lineage had given him. He was a man of double inheritance. His father was a pleasure-seeking, fond of women and drinker and his father was a scientist and had excavated more deeply into truths that lie at the heart of the universe. Som had inborn the traits of both, the womanizing and material pursuits of his grandfather and the scientific temperament of his father to seek for the first cause from "Whence and how arose the universe" (TLL 142). Although his father taught him out of his experiences that "science could not solve the problem of the causes", it was this lack of stability in the developmental stage at home that had led to such an anxiety in life. The traditional views were learnt by an ordinary Indian as a child and he realised – their significance as he grew up in life. This advantage was denied to the children of wealthy Indian families in Joshi's novels. In the name of freedom and modernity the child had been forced to look after for himself where important issues like religious beliefs were concerned. He felt the insecurity of one in a rudderless boat right from childhood. No amount of material property can give the child the secure sense of identity he felt with his own people.

The analysis of the above story made clear that Arun Joshi sought Indian philosophy to render a way to affirmation for existential problem of his protagonist. The central pursuit was the hunger of the body and the hunger of the soul and these two pursuits had been yoked together in the novel.

Anuradha was supposed to conquer Som to bring about a change in him. In other words, she refused to meet Som anymore- and disappeared under mysterious circumstances. She was a sharp contrast to Som who was broken in parts that remained irresolvable. He even doubted the great sacrifice Anuradha made for his cure and survival. The quest for truth and also for integrated identity remained an unachieved torment. Tapan Kumar Ghosh remarks: "*The Last Labyrinth* is a deep psychological exploration of a lost soul" (145). Ironically enough, Som's quest for identity remained questionable. Som Bhaskar represented the contemporary western educated rich middle-class who was excitedly searching for his roots.

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